

## KEYS TO FINEWOOL SHEEP PRODUCTION

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Texas has been the leading sheep and wool producing state for many years. While most of the sheep production is limited to Central and Southwest Texas, a wide variety of conditions and systems of production exist. Production in Central Texas is mostly farm flock production where the sheep are produced on stock farms. In this area the greatest emphasis is placed on lamb production.

In the southwestern part of the state, the flocks are much larger and are run strictly under range conditions. In good years quite a high percentage of lambs may go to market fat. In poor years the lambs are sold as feeders. These guidelines were developed to cover as many of these conditions as possible. Pick out the suggestions that fit your system of production.

### FLOCK REQUIREMENTS

1. Finewool ewes breed earlier, are better suited to existing range and environmental conditions and are more resistant to internal and external parasites than other breeds or crossbreeds.

2. In the production of feeders and stockers, replacements are raised to continue flock improvement and to supply replacements for other producers. Some producers raise replacements from top end of flock and breed bottom end to mutton type rams to produce market lambs.

3. In the production of market lambs some producers use the top end of their finewool flock to produce replacements and the bottom end is bred to mutton type rams to produce market lambs.

4. Follow a good selective breeding program for flock improvements. For further information on selective breeding programs see Extension Service Miscellaneous Publication 858, *Selecting Sheep for Wool and Mutton Production*.

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### RANGE MANAGEMENT

1. Use stocking rates consistent with the area of production.

2. Practice mixed grazing of livestock consistent with the area of production.

3. Practice rotation grazing for range improvement and for internal parasite control.

4. Follow range improvement practices recommended for the area and consistent with ranch economics.

5. Use supplemental pastures, when possible and practicable, to rest and improve native pastures.

### BREEDING PRACTICES

1. Use three to four rams per 100 ewes depending on size, roughness and brushiness of pasture.

2. Use finewool rams on the top end of the ewes to produce replacement ewes. Use medium wool rams on the low end of the flock to produce market lambs to take advantage of hybrid vigor.

3. Finewool ram lambs should weigh a minimum of 80, and medium wool ram lambs a minimum of 100 pounds before being used for breeding purposes.

4. Rams should be conditioned by supplemental feeding for about 2 weeks before the breeding season. The amount to feed depends on the condition of the rams and pastures. *Do not* get them too fat.

5. Some producers like to rotate rams. Turn out the top one-half of the rams first. Two or 3 weeks later, turn out the bottom one-half of the rams.

6. In the finewool breeding flocks, put the best rams with the best ewes, second best rams with the second best ewes and mutton type rams with the bottom ewes.

7. Breed ewes to lamb at a time consistent with the best production practices for your area and to take advantage of feed conditions.

8. The latest possible breeding date for the production of a fat lamb is September for February lambs.

9. When ranges have been extremely dry for extended periods, give ewes vitamins A, D, and E about 2 weeks before breeding.

10. Ewes may be flushed by placing them in a fresh rested pasture or by feeding  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of supplemental feed for about 2 weeks before breeding. Ewes need to be in good condition for best results at breeding time. The condition of the ewes and the cost of feed determine the advisability of this practice.

11. Drench ewes about 2 weeks before breeding if the ewes are parasitized.

12. Do not breed yearling finewool ewes to medium wool rams.

13. When possible select twin lambs for replacement ewes.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING**

1. Select one of the following feeding practices consistent with the size and quality of the pastures, conditions of the ewes and relative costs of the feeds.

2. Feed  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound of cottonseed cake per head daily.

3. Feed  $\frac{1}{3}$  to 1 pound of 20 percent range cubes per head daily.

4. Feed  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 pound of yellow corn per head daily.

5. Self-feeding, using salt as an inhibitor, may be desirable in rough or brushy pastures. Keep salt as low as possible and locate feeders away from water. Change location of feeders to get better utilization of pastures. A mixture of 1 part salt, 1 part protein supplement, and 3 parts of ground milo is a good mixture for self-feeding.

6. When feeding twice weekly, give one-half the weekly allotment at each feeding. With once weekly feeding, give the weekly allotment at one time.

#### **TAGGING AND SHEARING FACES**

1. Tag or crutch ewes and shear faces at least 1 month before lambing. Tagging is essential to the preparation of a good wool clip. Tagging

reduces chances for fleece worm infestation and makes it easier for new born lambs to nurse.

#### **LAMBING**

1. Lamb in pastures that have been rested for this purpose.

2. Disturb ewes as little as possible during lambing season.

#### **MARKING**

1. Castrate, dock and earmark for identification when majority of the lambs are on the ground (1 month to 6 weeks of age).

2. Vaccinate for soremouth at the time of marking.

3. Use registered identification marks to prevent theft.

4. Plastic eartags are desirable for identification. Different colored tags can represent years or quality groups for breeding program. Avoid using paint brands since they impair the value of the wool, especially where shearing twice a year is practiced.

#### **CREEP FEEDING**

1. Creep feeding may pay in years when there is a possibility of getting lambs fat or when the producer plans to finish lambs in the feedlot.

2. Feed straight maize, corn, oats, feedlot finishing ration or a special creep ration.

3. Research shows that special or complicated creep rations show no big advantage over simple ones.

4. Some ranchmen self-feed a cheap ration to the ewes near the creep to hold ewes in the area while the lambs use the creeps.

5. Start lambs on creeps when only a few days old as they go on feed easier and encounter less digestive problems.

6. If lambs are slow to start using creeps, pen an old ewe or two in the creep.

7. Alfalfa spread around the edges of the creeps may help get lambs started on feed.

8. Creep feeders with openings for lambs on all sides are preferred.

#### **FACING AND BOOTING**

1. Shear the faces and legs of lambs to be carried through the spear and needlegrass season. If speargrass is especially bad, it may be necessary to shear the bellies or even the whole lamb.



## SHEARING

1. Shear in March, April or May, according to the area of production. Shear early to avoid spear and needlegrass contamination.

2. Discuss preparation of the wool clip with your warehouseman. The practice of leaving fleeces untied should first be discussed with warehouseman.

3. Under twice a year shearing, shear in February, March or April and again in August, September or October depending on the area.

### 4. Producers' responsibilities

- Provide a clean place to shear and adequate equipment.
- Let the shearing crew know what is expected of them.
- Make sure the sheep are dry and not too full.
- Separate blackfaced and black sheep from the rest of the flock and shear them last.
- Separate yearlings from the rest of the flock and shear separately.
- Separate tender, coarse, black and extremely short fleeces from the rest of the clip.
- Consider the possibility of having the clip graded.
- Supervise or provide a supervisor for the shearing pen.
- Register complaints with shearing crew captain.

### 5. Shearers' responsibility

- Remove fleece in one piece with a minimum of double cuts.
- Keep fleeces clean.
- Avoid injury to animals. Have captain caution shearers about cutting teats and putting too much weight on the bellies.

### 6. Sweepers' responsibilities

- Keep the shearing floor clean and the tags picked up and packed separately.

### 7. Pickup boys' responsibilities

- Roll fleeces in an attractive manner with the side wool on the outside.
- Use both hands when carrying fleeces to the tying table.

### 8. Tiers' responsibilities

- The tier should tie the fleece firmly but not too tightly.

- Remove tags and sweatlocks that are exposed after tying.
- Use only paper fleece twine for tying fleeces.

### 9. Packers' responsibilities

- Pack bags in an attractive manner whether using the flat or round bag system of packing. Flat packed bags give the best appearance.
- Pack bags firmly, but not too tightly. Excessive tromping distorts the fleeces and injures the appearance of the clip.
- Do not allow bags to touch the ground. Lower them to a clean floor or to a tarpaulin before loading.

## SPRAYING

1. Spray sheep out of the shearing pen.

2. Follow recommendations in Extension MP-791, *Texas Guide for Controlling External Parasites of Livestock and Poultry*.

3. Change sprays from time to time to prevent parasites from building up a resistance.

### 4. Follow these precautions.

- Use only recommended sprays or dips in strengths recommended by the food and drug administration.
- Follow guidelines for spraying or dipping animals to go for slaughter.
- Do not spray in a shed or barn.
- Spray with the wind — not against it.
- Do not mix sprays with your hands.
- Spray or dip animals at a time of day when it will be possible to bathe and change clothes.
- Do not mix chemicals.
- Know the location of the nearest hospital equipped to treat chemical poisoning.

## DRENCHING

1. Most ranchmen practice drenching out of the shearing pen. Use one of the drenches recommended in Extension MP-396, *Common Internal Parasites of Sheep and Goats*.

2. Watch animals closely and drench as needed.

3. Know symptoms of internal parasitism:

- Loss of appetite and subsequent loss of weight.
- Diarrhea or scouring.
- Anemia — paleness of the membranes around the eyes, lips and mouth.
- Depressed appetite — eating of dirt.

- Edema — swelling underneath the jaws called "bottlejaw" and possibly along brisket and underline of animal.

4. Change drenches occasionally so that parasites do not build up resistance to a specific drench.

5. Be careful not to injure the linings of the mouth or throat when drenching. A piece of surgical rubber tubing on the end of the drench gun will prevent this type of injury.

6. Isolate and feed animals with exceptionally high infestations of parasites.

## MARKETING

1. Sell fat lambs when they reach a good degree of finish or desirable weight and give the greatest return to the producer. Fat lambs usually weigh 75 to 105 pounds.

2. Sell feeder and stocker lambs when the greatest return can be realized. These lambs usually weigh 60 to 80 pounds.

3. Market lambs through a reputable commission man or auction ring.

4. Market wool through the Texas warehouse system on an original bag or graded basis.

## RECORD KEEPING

1. Keep records on lamb weights, lamb crop percentages, fleece weights, wool shrinkage, and staple length as this information is necessary to the operation of a good selective breeding program.

## ECONOMIC DATA

1. Cost and return information for different areas of production is available. See Extension MP-820, *Texas Annual Ewe Costs and Returns by Area*.

## REFERENCES FOR ADDITIONAL READING

### Texas Agricultural

#### Extension Service Publications

- B-237 Preparing Wool for Market
- B-858 Selecting Sheep for Wool and Mutton Production
- MP-396 Common Internal Parasites of Sheep and Goats
- MP-691 Texas Guide for Controlling External Parasites of Livestock and Poultry
- MP-707 Evaluation of Lambs for Carcass Retail Cutout Value
- MP-721 How Much Did You Get For Your Wool?
- MP-834 External Parasites of Sheep and Goats in Texas
- MP-820 Texas Annual Ewe Costs and Returns by Areas
- MP-838 Marketing Wool for More Profit
- L-322 Creep Feeding Lambs
- L-616 Seasonal Price Variations in Texas Lambs and Wool
- B-827 Sheep Production in Texas

### Texas Agricultural

#### Experiment Station Publications

- B-875 Marketing Sheep and Lambs in Texas
- B-974 Wool Marketing Problems in Texas
- B-981 Characteristics and Feasibility of Marketing Texas Grease Wool on a Known Quality Basis
- B-1050 Reproductive Efficiency of Finewool Sheep
- MP-435 Major Economic Factors Affecting Returns from Lamb Feeding in Texas
- MP-596 Influence of Age and Fertility of Rambouillet Ewes on Lamb and Wool Production